

THE COLLAPSE OF THIS PARTICULAR VISUAL HAGIOGRAPHY

At this point, our cycle entitled *Foundation, Glory, and Decline of the Mythic Lutherania* is in its final, crucial stage, I mean: its collapse, the outcome of its tragedy. All those years, in which Reality was translated into a grayed scale and supported by a golden background, it is all but over. That free translation of the seventh chapter of the Saint Paul's Epistle of Romans —without which Lutherania would have never existed— is pure nostalgia now:

22 For I delight in the law of *Gray* after the inward man:
23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law
of my mind, bringing me into captivity to the law of *color*
which is in my members,
24 O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the
color of this death?
25 I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the
mind I myself serve the law of *Gray*; but with the flesh the
law of *color*.

My suspicion is that iconographer Allegorius of Sevastopol perceived as a religious failure the very fact of not including any Crucifixion —or at least some Jesus Christ's life scenes— in the corpus of his main work, namely: the *Polyptych*. The prevailing Platonic-Aristotelian idea of *causality* is an all-pervading notion, and unnerved any possible struggle between antagonistic forces —like those Empedocles' principles of *Strife and Love* or Manichean ones— The King over all the Children of Pride¹ —namely, the Babylonian monster *Leviathan*— is grounded at the bottom of the main panel of the polyptych, but this smoking, ferocious oceanic beast is behind bars, and also under the Law of Causality. It is a tranquil, serene Universe where bestial instinctive behavior, human licentiousness or divine wrath has been all avoided at any cost. Our iconographer is committed to present a *harmonious Universe*, not only through its plastic appearance or composition, but also by expressly writing some few free verses as well:

And from The Highest, elegant wooden boxes came down;
According to Measure all of them in tension stringed;
No performer their strings has plucked;
And all of them, by mastery Bow, have mysteriously sounded.
Though variously shaped, all of them in Harmony chained,
Fatalistically, predictably they sounded.²

Any expression of pain or pleasure has been precluded from our polyptych. Adopting a passionless view rather than that of Aristotle's principle of moving pleasure³, Allegorius

¹ Job, 41:34.

² *Epiphany*, Allegorius of Sevastopol, circa 2004. Among his papers, we find long quotations drawn from the Abbot Suger, and the following one is emblematic about the ideology which nourished Allegorius' mind: "The admirable power of one unique and supreme reason equalizes by proper composition the disparity between things human and Divine; and what seems mutually to conflict by inferiority of origin and contrariety of nature is conjoined by the single, delightful concordance of one superior, well-tempered harmony." *The Other Little Book on the Consecration of the Church of St. Denis*. Also Fray Luis de León in his *Oda a Francisco Salinas*: "It sees how the great master, playing on that immense cither with skilled notions, produces the sacred sound by which this eternal temple is sustained. And as it is composed of harmonious numbers, it sends out a reply in concord; and the two tunes mingle and compete in the sweetest harmony." The British Neo-Platonist Cudworth placed the same frame of thinking: "...yet we are all this while, but like dead Instruments of Musick, that sound sweetly and harmoniously, when they are onely struck, and played upon from without, by the Musician Hand, who hath the Theory of Musick, living within himself." *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*.



conceived a *Primum Mobile* in which pleasure—even the theoretical one as Aristotle preached it—has been severed as well: it is a mere piece of masonry, which echoes Piranesi's engravings; a totally no-fatherly machinery, and avoiding any warming touch with Adam or Eve. The Unmoved Mover of the Universe—to which either Catholics or post-Luther Protestants are so fond—is no more than a well-crafted piece of cosmological engineering, with no regards whatsoever to the four Gospels' God-Father. With Allegorius' god, *theological apathy* gets its highest expression.

Another crucial religious tenet has been straightforwardly discarded, namely: the capital Christian notion of *Redemption*⁴. Diluted in a circular enchainment—as enchanting and delightful as a merry-go-round—the event of Salvation is absent in this *Polyptych*: it is pure optimism; Adam and Eve are presented in their glorious days, before their moral debacle, flanked by the most sophisticated musical instruments, ostentatious buildings of a city which considers itself as a well mechanized, righteous theocracy; nature in an even lower level, and finally the very rock of some kind of mineral placed as the lowest stage of this Hierarchical-Theatrical Reality: Pure Neo-Platonism, if not optimistic as well, it is insensible or neutral to sub-lunar tragedies, at least.⁵ The

³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, book 2, VII: "Now it is in just this way that the object of desire and the object of thought produce movement—they move without being moved...The object of appetite is what seems good, and the primary object of wish is what is really good...."

⁴ This is an old problem—already remarked by von Harnack—present in the first theological system of Christianity, namely: Origen's theology. No balance had been achieved between his *cosmological vocation* and the idea of *redemption*, and the cause of such an imbalance—to my understanding—is his misty, all-encompassing Neo-Platonic background. It is hard to imagine a Greek, either Anaxagoras, Heraclitus, Plato or Aristotle, assembling a cosmology with, so to speak, a pretentious redemptive chapter. For instance, in his *Homilies on Genesis*, Origen insists profusely in empowering human soul as an *agent of knowledge*, and not so much as a *depraved agent* to be *redeemed*: "And just as the eyes of our body are not equally enlightened by the sun, but to the extent that one shall have ascended to higher places and contemplated its risings with a gaze from a higher vantage point, to such an extent will he perceive more of both its splendor and its heat (Christ's ones)" Pages later, Origen presents Noah's ark as *the Universal Order*, a hierarchical one: "A multitude of other irrational animals or even beast is held in the lower decks, and especially a multitude of those beast whose fierce raging the charm of faith has not tamed...And thus by ascending through the individual levels of the dwellings, one arrives at Noah himself, whose name means rest or righteous, who is Christ Jesus." This hierarchy is immutable and free of painful contradictions: "If there is anyone who can turn from the things which are in flux and passing away and fallen...this man is building an ark of salvation within his own hearth and is dedicating a library, so to speak, of the divine word within himself." Ibid. Even more crucial is this paragraph of his *Commentary of John*, Book I: "And wherever it is necessary to preach the literal gospel declaring among the carnal that we 'know nothing except Jesus Christ, and him crucified,' we must do this. But whenever we find those who are established in the Spirit and are bearing fruit in him and desiring the heavenly wisdom, we ought to share with them the Logos who was restored from being made flesh to what 'he was in the beginning with God.'" Clearly, the Crucified One is at a literal or carnal level and in need of being healed from his temporal-carnal disgrace, such a condition is a stumbling block for any Neo-Platonic Geared-Universe-Machine. In his *Ad Thalassium*, the Neo-Platonist Maximus the Confessor—who had influenced on the already quoted abbot Suger—also states a reconciliation of the opposites or infirmities: "For the union between a limit of the ages and limitlessness, between measure and immensurability, between finitude and infinity, between Creator and creation, between rest and motion, was conceived before ages." Just passing on the particular without giving us any further clue, Panofsky says that Flemish painters from Low Countries had certainly known something about the Neo-Platonist Nicholas de Cusa, in 15th century: "Bartolomeo Fazio, a humanist of Genoa...comes very close to the great secret of Eckyian painting: the simultaneous realization, and, in a sense, reconciliation, of the 'two infinities,' the infinitesimally small and the infinitely large." The famous Eyck's polyptych also shows an apathetic God, as if he were coined in Neo-Platonic studio. Suggestively, Nicolaus' Cusanus in *De Docto Ignorantia I*, 4.XII says: "For maximum quantity is maximum large; and minimum quantity is maximally small. Therefore, if you free maximum and minimum from quantity—by mentally removing large and small—you will see clearly that maximum and minimum coincide." In the same way, Allegorius' *Polyptych* rests heavily in the Eastern Neo-Platonic theology of harmony and light, in which every contrariety—either theoretical or practical—has been calmly solved.

⁵ Talking about the latinized Neo-Platonist Scotus Erigena, by the way the main responsible for disseminating Neo-Platonic notions in Western Europe, Schopenhauer was certainly aware of his system's perils: "Quite consistently in the sense of pantheism, Scotus Erigena declares every phenomenon to be a theophany; but then this concept must be applied also to terrible and ghastly phenomena: fine theophanies!" *The World as Will and Representation*. Being an atheist as in fact Schopenhauer was, it causes amazement to read these words of his as well: "With me, on the other hand, the will, or the inner nature of the world, is by no means Jehovah; on the contrary, it is, so to speak, the crucified Saviour, or else of the thieves..."



radical depravity of human nature—as Luther and Calvin preached it—cannot be seen here; those Apostle's words in his Epistle to Romans, in which he states that “*the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now*”⁶ waiting for “*The Final Redemption*”, are totally obliterated in this very piece of art. To my mind, then, this iconographical cycle turned into crumbles for three reasons, two of them were already stated: first of all, that massive invasion by air, earth, and sea of the nominalistic army, which signifies a plain rejection of any metaphysical nuances—either the *Primum Mobile* or any *Logos christology*—; secondly, the suppressed *Calvary Event*; and thirdly, this unprecedented, strange *bicolor lamb* in oil on canvas that I present below: *Color*—once a frightening and contemptible condition to Allegorius’ of Sevastopol opinion—has finally arrived. By observing this angelic lamb, one may well feel the temptation of using Allegorius’ “exegetical method,” by saying,

19 For the *Gray* that I would, I would not:
but the *color* which I would not, that
I do.

20 Now if I do that I would not, it is no more
I that do it, but *color* that dwelleth in me.

21 I find then a law, that, when I would do *Gray*,
color is present with me.⁷

That visual hyper-stoicism—so characteristic of Allegorius’ previous golden-grayed icons—vanished forever. This *lamb* is a *Triumphant One*: a self-confident creature, which has been already divinized and spared of any sacrificial rite. Again, any traumatic event has been carefully, purposely banished, as if moral or spiritual grief were a sort of an even more contemptible sin. However, and as a kind of remedy to his christologically impaired *Polyptych*, our iconographer conceived this almost bacchanal lamb, crowned with grapevine and showing its grapes, as a very desperate, ultimate attempt of christianization. Stubbornly, Hermeneutius Zeitgeist⁸ insists on the idea that this Allegorius’ exotic lamb is well rooted in the Catholic, medieval artistic tradition of painting blue and red angels, usually surrounding God, the Virgin or even Christ. This Allegorius’ lamb is a consummated theophany, after going through a process called *theosis*, that is to say: *divinization*.

⁶ Saint Paul, *Rom.* 8:22.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7:19–21.

⁸ Hermeneutius Zeitgeist, Exegesis Zitsimleben’s protégée, who supported with genuflection any sort of doctrines, as long as they were officially accepted by the City of Lutherania’s Council. Novatian, in his treatise on *Trinity*, considers Christ as an angel: “The title of angel is also appropriate to Christ because He was made ‘The Angel of Great Counsel’.” He is an angel because He lays bare the hearth of the Father.” In his *Adversus Praxeas*, Tertullian identified God’s *sermo* or *Discourse* with Genesis 1:3: *Let there be light*. Due to his obscure Neo-Platonic rhetoric, Saint Augustine is not so clear about the relationship between Christ—Tertullian’s *sermo*—and angels: “For when God said, ‘Let there be light,’ if we are justified in understanding in this light the creation of angels, then certainly they were created partakers of the eternal light which is the unchangeable Wisdom of God, by which all things were made, and whom we call the only-begotten Son of God.” *The City of God*. Nine centuries later, in his *Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, Master of San Francesco Bardi depicted a crucified Christ Jesus with seraphic endowments, and in contact with the Highest Divine Sphere of Darkness, an obvious Neo-Platonic feature. So we might rightly infer that Allegorius’ lamb is obviously Christ, and its red and blue wool strengthens even more the *angelic status* of Christ as well. Both blue and red colors have meaningful theological implications: “Two colors had...been recognized as invested with special significance, red as the colour of flame, and symbolical of holy love (*caritas*), blue as significant of heavenly contemplation or divine knowledge. And in the latter tradition of Christian art (from the 9th century onwards) these two colours were as a general rule assigned, red more especially to the seraphim as the spirits of love, and blue to the cherubim as spirits of knowledge or of contemplation...” *A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities*, 1893 London edition.





I cannot but to refer to another Allegorius' oil color painting: the portrait of Francesco Landini. Detecting symbols in everything, everywhere, and in everyone, as in fact his profession of hagiographer demands, Allegorius of Sevastopol placed this portrait of *il Cieco degli organi*—the blind of the organ— at the end of his iconographical cycle, and this in no way capriciously. Landini—a fourteenth century musician and humanist from Florence— represented or made echoes of an ideological crisis rooted in the philosophy of William of Ockham. In *Laudem loyce Ockham*, this Florentine composer extols Ockham by mocking medieval scholastic method of theologizing:

“Ay! How much bluish, dark envy commands wretched mortals;
how many pointless reasons she gives by blinding mind's eyes!...
how many syllogistic fellows, how many slippery, shallow
sophisms destroy [our] discourse slowly! However, harsh
facts impose by themselves, and these audacious but exhausted
sophists nothing prove”⁹

Secondly, while a child, Landini faced a devastating personal crisis: he got blindness. Our artist interpreted this Landini's misfortune allegorically, as the very *symbol of Faith*. Thus, and extremely consistent, the blinded Landini is directly related with the icon *The Knight of Faith*,

⁹ From Codex Riccardiano 688: *Incipiunt versus Francisci organiste de Florentia, missi ad Dominum Antonium plebanum de Vado, gramatice, loyce, rethoricae optimum instructorem, et facti in laudem loyce Ockham*. In *Rinascimento, Rivista dell'Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento*, anno terzo, giugno MCMLIII, numero 1.



which happens to be the first icon of the whole cycle *Foundation, Glory, and Decline of the Mythic Lutherania*, and it was designed sixteen years before Landini was painted: not only the rider is blind, but also his horse is blinded under a heavy, densely blackened fabric. As the reader may well already noticed, a rigorous plan went through all these years in Allegorius' mind, probably unnoticed to him, but once it was made palpable, *conversion* was unstoppable. So there is a turning point that must be unavoidably addressed, namely: the conversion of his name *Allegorius of Sevastopol* into *Rara Avis*. Quite surprisingly, Catholic academicians are much more fitted for defining what means to be "a Protestant" than Protestants themselves. Gilson, for instance, is not certainly an exception to this rule by remarking that after Luther, the most celebrated Lutherans –Leibniz & Co.— made plenty of room for crafting the so-called Philosophies of Nature. For this reason, then, he concluded that to find "a real Lutheran" must be an exceptional one, the very case of a *rara avis*¹⁰ –a strange bird, indeed— We have just few oil portraits signed by Rara Avis –including the Landini's one—



¹⁰ E. Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*. Another prominent Catholic scholar, Menéndez y Pelayo, defines the very essence of Protestantism in his monumental work *Historia de los Heterodoxos Españoles*, particularly in the chapter where he describes the inquisitorial trial against the Bishop of Toledo, Bartolomé de Carranza, a suspect of Lutheranism. Among other things, this Dominican theologian was accused of denying any competence to Reason in matters of Faith.





Finally, and as a kind of epilogue, it must be also addressed a hurtful fact for us: to the best of my knowledge, Protestantism has not generated a single person, someone gifted enough for dealing with Art: the too much trodden, desperate commonplace of glorifying Bach, Hændel & Co. unceasingly does not resist a severe minimum analysis: if any gracious gesture or a slighted decorum were still noticed in them, that is nothing more and nothing else than the heritage from the venerable Venetian Giovanni Gabrieli, and if any unbearable boredom or any timeless eruption – *verbigratia*, the *vociferous molto rumoroso* Hændel's *Halleluiah!* — it must be regarded to their own decorative natures exclusively. Thus, all those never ending, glorifying chants of praise should have been rather offered to Machault's oldest son in fifteenth century, our angelic John Dunstable, or to our almighty Felix Mendelssohn, a Jew by the way. From the Calvinist musical side, after the unmatched sweetness of Vitry or Dufay – curiously enough, both Catholic priests as the magnanimous Leoninus and Perotinus — the Huguenots De Sermisy, Le Jeune & Co. are no more than accomplished masters of sleepiness or somnolence, at best. Even monsieur Clément Janequin – no matter how Circensian his compositions were — has had probed narcotic effects on complete audiences till today. Once talking with Heine, and after having taken precautions that any other witnesses were walking around there, the officially Lutheran Hegel shared with him this metaphor: "Stars are leprosy of heavens."¹¹ In America, the puritan Edwards – following straightforwardly Plato & Co.— designed, let allow me to say, his cardiac-forensic-intellectual Aesthetics: "But virtue is the beauty of those qualities and acts of the mind that are of a *moral* nature, i.e. such as are attended with dessert or worthiness of *praise* or *blame*.... And

¹¹ H. Heine, *Confessions*.



therefore when we are inquiring concerning the nature of true virtue, viz. wherein this true and general beauty of the heart does most essentially consists, this is my answer to the inquiry."¹² His fellow citizen, the puritan Hawthorn, showed no sympathy at all for the arts as well. One of his characters says: "What is he?" murmurs one gray shadow of my forefathers to other. 'A writer of story-books! What kind of a business in life, what mode of glorifying God, or being serviceable to mankind in his day of and generation, may that be? Why, the degenerate fellow might as well have been a fiddler!'"¹³ Another Calvinist—Tolstoy—speaks volumes of resentment against Michelangelo, passing through Beethoven and Baudelaire¹⁴, till Wilde.¹⁵ Professor Tillich—a sort of Lutheran—starts his essays on art and architecture in the most risible way, trying to find desperately "Protestant art works" wherever else, and at hefty prices.¹⁶ It must be also confessed that I fancied myself of having some kind of hope in *il signore* Jaroslav, as if he were endowed with some touch of *dialectical finesse*, but after his—so to speak—disguised, concealed, or second ranked plagiarism¹⁷ to the unforgettable Leo Shestov's work *Jerusalem and Athens*, one has lost any possible, or at least, any foreseeable agreement between Protestantism and Art: being unable to hold the intensity of any form of religious heroism—in Kierkegaard's words, a genuine Protestantism means "to risk unreservedly being oneself, an individual human being, this specific individual human being alone before God"¹⁸—the former northlander Pelikan behaved like those Vikings who thought—at their arrival to Constantinople—that they were at the very Micklegarth or even at Asgard, fatherland of gods: as an overeducated Varangian guard, I say, Pelikan sheltered himself into the deep Russian Orthodox Church's liturgical paraphernalia, with all the implications of this for the understanding of Art and Religion. To make things even more difficult, there is documentary evidence of Pelikan's cautious aversion against any supposed or presumptuous "Protestant artist": Naturally! After such morbid metaphors of the Lutheran Hegel, after the forensic-cardiac-intellectual-Beauty of the Calvinist Edwards, and after that depraved, failed violinist of the puritan Hawthorn, little wonder if the reborn-Byzantine Pelikan felt some sort of reticence or even contempt about them: probably this was his wisest side after all.¹⁹

¹² J. Edwards, *The Nature of Virtue*.

¹³ N. Hawthorn, *The Scarlet Letter*.

¹⁴ In his *Squibs*, Baudelaire probably gave us a hint about our present problem: "The Protestant countries lack two elements indispensable to the happiness of a well-bred man: gallantry and devotion." No other thing Art is. It is worthy of notice that, in general, Protestant temples have their *vitreaux*—stained glasses—timidly placed behind parishioners' backs, I mean, in the choir place, just above the narthex of the temple, where only the preacher is able to see them, and if some vitreaux were placed in the sanctuary, they are extremely abstract, or which is the same: meaningless. A clear symptom of uneasiness or even confusion regarding to what place Art may possibly have in Protestant traditions. In his *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin seems to follow Baudelaire's spirit when talking about Torcello, in which there is a weeping Madonna: "[It] may indeed be matter of sorrow to the Protestant beholder, but ought not be blind him to the earnestness and singleness of the faith with which these men sought their sea-solitudes; not in hope of founding new dynasties, or entering upon new epochs of prosperity, but only to humble themselves before God, and to pray that in His infinite mercy He would hasten the time when the sea should give up the dead which were in it...The Protestant beholder may now advisedly reserve his sorrow for those of his own sect, now numerous enough, who deny the efficacy of prayer altogether."

¹⁵ L. Tolstoy, *What is Art?*

¹⁶ P. Tillich, *On Art and Architecture*.

¹⁷ "Plagiarism" is a totally foreign, misleading notion for the Arts; it is just a commercial one, so I deplore to use it here. However it describes Pelikan's attitude. Probably the right expression is Pelikan's *masquerade*, entitled *What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?* An obvious, jealous mockery to Shestov.

¹⁸ S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*.

¹⁹ J. Pelikan, once editor-in-chief of the German reformer Martin Luther's works in English in the United States, author of scholarly books, and academician at Yale University till his death. Documentary showing Pelikan's disdain about pretentious "Protestant artists" available at *Allegorius' of Sevastopol and Rara Avis' Archives*. Copies upon request. After receiving *Allegorius-Rara Avis' Lutheran Iconography*, Pelikan replied in this way: "Dear Allegorius: Your letter arrived today. I am touched by your predicament, but I am probably not the right one for you to address. You may not have heard that I have been received into the Orthodox Church, which also implies a quite different approach to icons and religious art. Sincerely, Jaroslav Pelikan, August 20th, 1998." Yale University was founded by Protestants in 1640, and officially established as such in 1701.



The latest new that I have received from Rara Avis is that his *Lutheran Iconography* is almost in its final stages of completion, and in my last conversation with him, he confessed me: "I am crucified between my inextinguishable thirst of Beauty —probably my Italian side— and my conception of Christianity." Without adding any further words, he gave me a little piece of a written paper that said: "*The definition of beauty is easy; it is what leads to desperation.*" I am still carrying such a piece of paper in my pocket, wherever I go. A Valéry's quotation, I trust. I am totally clueless about this renamed, reborn man's whereabouts, this man who once prided himself of being *a crafter of theophanies, a hagiographer of the Universe.*

A. Pecorelli

